

Needs Assessment for Clarksburg Library

September 22, 2001

The Montgomery County Public Libraries' "Strategic Facilities Plan FY 1998-2003" identifies five areas of the county where population growth would require expansion of library services. One of those areas is the historic town of Clarksburg in northern Montgomery County, east of I-270. The community and the Planning Board have worked for thirty years to create a plan for the development of the town that would preserve its rural heritage. Development has now begun. In order to provide equitable access to library services to all of the county's population centers, the town will need its own library.

POPULATION

In the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of the town of Clarksburg was 1,834. Planning Area 13, "Clarksburg and Vicinity" had 2,020 people in the 1997 Census Update Survey prepared by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. However, according to the most recent forecasts, household population in Clarksburg's Planning Area will grow as follows:

8,200 by 2005
17,600 by 2010
29,700 by 2015
36,900 by 2020
37,000 by 2025.¹

The maximum development potential of the area is approximately 14,930 dwelling units of various types.²

In September 2000, developers broke ground on 768 residential units, the first phase of the Clarksburg Town Center. The Town Center, including the historic district, will be developed as a "neo-traditional" mixed-use neighborhood. Buildings with retail storefronts may house offices or residences on upper floors. At build-out, the Town Center could have 2,600 dwelling units and up to 300,000 square feet of commercial space.³

¹ "Household Population Forecasts for Montgomery County Planning Areas, 1995-2025: Round 6.2 Forecast," (Silver Spring, MD: Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning, Research and Technical Center, June 2000). At www.mc-mncppc.org/factmap/databook/pop/po10.htm.

² Approved and Adopted Clarksburg Master Plan and Hyattstown Special Study Area, (Silver Spring, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, June 1994), p. 40.

³ *Ibid*, p. 44-46.

Clarksburg's planners hope to encourage pedestrians and bicyclists, reducing residents' dependence on automobiles. Accessible via an extensive greenway/bikeway network, the Town Center will have a Transit Stop for commuters and those using local buses.

Two employment centers along I-270, the county's high-technology corridor, could generate as many as 20,000 local jobs.⁴

The Montgomery County public school system is building new facilities in Clarksburg to accommodate growing numbers of students. Currently, students in the Planning Area attend Clarksburg Elementary, Cedar Grove Elementary, Rocky Hill Middle School, and Damascus High School. The school system will replace Rocky Hill Middle School in 2004 and refurbish its building for a new high school, scheduled to open in September 2005. An eight-room addition to Clarksburg Elementary is also planned. The Clarksburg Master Plan envisions as many as six new elementary schools, based on the MCPS assumption that a school is needed for every 1,800 to 2,200 households.⁵

CRITERIA FOR NEW LIBRARY SERVICE

The Montgomery County Public Libraries' "Strategic Facilities Plan FY 1998-2003" lists three factors for consideration in providing new library service. The Clarksburg area meets the necessary conditions.

1. *Population. A minimum of 5,000 people for a branch (storefront/leased) library and 16,000 for a community (stand-alone, County owned) library.*

The Clarksburg population will reach the 5,000-person minimum for branch-level service before 2005 and the minimum for community level service by 2010, according to forecasts.⁶

2. *Distance from existing facilities. Most residents should have a library within 2 miles of home; rural residents should not have to drive more than 20 minutes to reach a library.*

The Germantown Library, the closest facility to Clarksburg, is 4 to 6 miles away. Gaithersburg Library is over 9 miles from the center of Clarksburg. The Damascus

⁴ Ibid, p. 30.

⁵ Ibid, p. 166.

⁶ "Household Population Forecasts for Montgomery County Planning Areas, 1995-2025: Round 6.2 Forecast," (Silver Spring, MD: Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning, Research and Technical Center, June 2000). At www.mc-mnccpc.org/factmap/databook/pop/po10.htm.

Library is about 6-1/2 miles from the center of Clarksburg; however, back roads make it a longer drive than the trip to Gaithersburg, generally.

3. *Level of business at the nearest libraries. Use circulation per square foot as a measure of the libraries' ability to absorb more business.*

The Germantown Library is very heavily used. It claims the third highest circulation per square foot in the system (37.8 in FY2001), after the Noyes and Quince Orchard libraries. It circulated 605,263 items in FY2001, the sixth highest circulation figure among all the branches of the library system. Additionally, it had the third highest number of new registrations among all the branches in FY2001. The library has been so popular that a strong lobbying effort by the community resulted in approval for a new, much larger building in the Town Center to serve its residents. This busy, crowded library will not easily be able to absorb Clarksburg customers as that community grows.

The Gaithersburg Library has by far the highest circulation figures in the library system: 980,585 items checked out in FY2001 and over 1,000,000 checked in. It has the highest number of new registrants for library cards. Its circulation per square foot in FY2001 was 27.8. This busy, crowded library will not easily be able to absorb Clarksburg customers as that community grows.

The Damascus Library circulated 348,237 items in FY2001. Its circulation per square foot of 21.2 places it among the bottom quarter of the branches. On the positive side, the Damascus Library is the only close-by facility that can easily absorb additional customers. On the negative side, Damascus is approximately 6-1/2 miles from the Clarksburg town center.

RATIONALE FOR A LIBRARY IN THE CLARKSBURG TOWN CENTER

The Clarksburg Master Plan refers several times to the desirability of a library to serve as a "community magnet" in the Town Center.⁷ Perceived as a safe public place, a library promotes social interaction and provides meeting space. It supports cultural events and develops educational programming. It can be the technological "nerve center" of a community.

Building Clarksburg's library in the Town Center makes good sense. It would be convenient to commuters using the Transit Stop and accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists from the greenways. Being open evening and weekend hours, it would enliven the town's streetscape. A location in the Town Center would give the library visibility

⁷ Approved and Adopted Clarksburg Master Plan and Hyattstown Special Study Area, (Silver Spring, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, June 1994), p. 49, 155, 167.

and place it near other community services such as day care, a community center, or a senior center.

A possible model for library service in Clarksburg would follow the example of the Poolesville library. When Poolesville left its shared space in the junior/senior high school in 1991, it moved to a leased storefront with 4,870 square feet. At that time, its library service area had a population of about 5,300. In 2001, an additional 2,130 square feet were added to the branch.

Another model of service would co-locate the library with other government services. The Germantown library, which opened in a leased storefront in 1987, moved in 1991 to its current facility in the Upcounty Government Center, a building shared with other county functions, such as the Upcounty Regional Services Center, recreation and parks offices, and health and human service agencies. The Damascus Library, which also started in a storefront, now shares a 1990 building with a senior center. In Clarksburg, developers will be providing Montgomery County a 10,000-square-foot civic building in the Town Center.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The libraries' "Strategic Facilities Plan FY 1998-2003" foresaw the need for a library in Clarksburg, and current and future development confirms that need. The community and its planners support the opening of a library, and, specifically, its location in the Town Center.

Montgomery County Public Libraries recommends that a library be opened in Clarksburg by 2005, either in leased storefront space or in a civic building shared with other government services. Using the Poolesville model, the library would be open about 46 hours per week and have a collection of up to 60,000 items as well as electronic access to library resources.

As the population grows, perhaps by 2010, MCPL expects that Clarksburg will require a larger, stand-alone, County-owned facility that would be open 55 hours per week with a collection of up to 110,000 items.